

# HOOSIERS START A RAILROAD



## THE MONON

*By S. H. Holbrook*

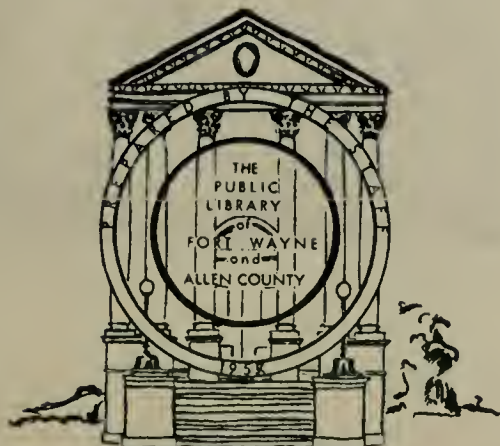


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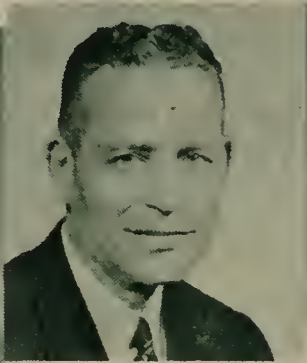
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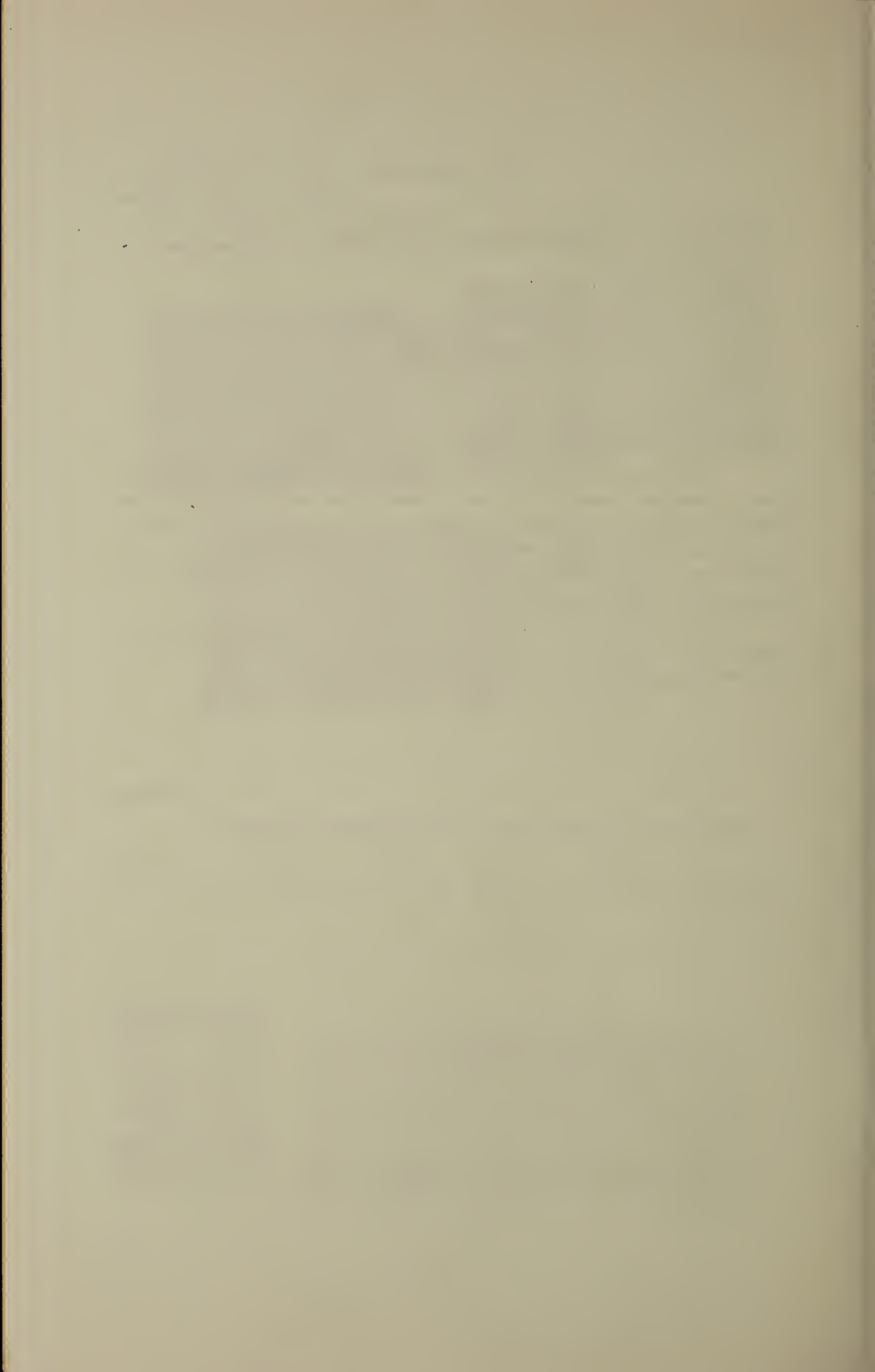


## FOREWORD

In 1847 a group of Hoosiers organized the New Albany & Salem Railroad, one of Indiana's pioneer railroads.

The following publication, recounting the building, growth, and subsequent history of this railroad (the present-day Monon Route), originally appeared as chapter 9 of THE STORY OF AMERICAN RAILROADS by Stewart H. Holbrook. The volume was published by Crown Publishers, Inc., in 1947. The publisher has graciously granted permission to reprint.

The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County present this account in the hope that it will prove interesting and informative to Library patrons.





THE stock certificates of the New Albany & Salem Rail Road Company were handsome and also rather chaste, when compared to the flamboyance of most railroad printing of the day, which was the middle of last century. There was, of course, a picture of a train of cars, for no symbol of the nineteenth century was more potent than one of a locomotive with its brigade of clattering boxes on wheels. The particular train of the New Albany & Salem is just rounding a graceful curve of track, the 4-4-0 locomotive sending up from its stack a pleasing cloud of smoke that curls back over the coaches and so on into the distance. The engine is hauling five passenger cars. The tender is obviously piled high with cordwood. The grade looks pretty good. The train is passing through a modest forest, while far in the rear are high hills, almost mountains, of a size one does not ordinarily think of in relation to Indiana. But then, Indiana has always been a place for artists, either of brush or pen, and they are men who hold license to see things with their own eyes and not as described by ordinary people.

The New Albany & Salem was an Indiana railroad of purest genealogy out of which was to grow the present Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville, commonly and with much greater felicity known as the Monon Route. It sprang from the desire of Salem citizens to connect their village with the nearby Ohio River at New Albany; and also, in the mind of at least one Salemite, to connect the Ohio River with the Great Lakes. The founding fathers believed, after a bit, that such a road would make both Salem and New Albany vast cities of the Midwest by developing a traffic in freight and passengers all along its entire length of nearly 300 miles. The belief was typical of the time, a time when the very name of railroad was sheer magic. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, that the steam cars could not accomplish in the way of improving a region.

When the New Albany & Salem was incorporated in 1847, the former place had a population of 8,181 and was the largest city in all Indiana.



Salem was a mere hamlet of 2,223 persons, and its citizens thought—oddly enough, perhaps—that by connecting their town with the great river port of New Albany, its own growth would be assured. This explains the fact that most if not all of the early stockholders were Salemites.

In all such groups there is always one leading spirit, and he who was to lead the New Albany & Salem through its first difficult years was James Brooks, a State of Mainer born in Orlington who was thirty-seven years old when he incorporated the railroad. His business was running a store in Salem. It was he who intended the new road to run not only between the two towns of its corporate title, but on and on up through the middle of Indiana until the tracks came up short on the Lake Michigan shore, almost exactly 288 miles from New Albany.

Brooks and his fellow "commissioners," as they were called, managed to raise sufficient money to begin construction early in 1848. Brooks was elected president, and along with that job he appears to have been forced by circumstances into filling several other positions, one of which was the difficult work of persuading Hoosier farmers to allow right-of-way across their lands without asking damages ruinous to the new company. He seems to have been pretty good at this. His policy, which he defined in a number of letters, was that if the railroad damaged a man by building the road over his farm more than the farm was benefited by having the railroad there, he would pay such damage. But, however, if the so-called damage left the farm of more value than before the arrival of the rails, then, said Brooks in his best judicial manner, "we think he is not entitled to any damage as we leave him better off than we found him, notwithstanding we may use a few acres of his land in doing it." Brooks also believed, and his belief was virtually dogma, that iron rails almost automatically did a farm more good than harm.

Two years after beginning of construction the New Albany & Salem had completed 27 miles of road and was the third longest railway in the state, the two longer being the gigantic Madison & Indianapolis, with 88 miles of road, and the Indianapolis & Belfontaine with 28 miles. The mileage for the entire state totaled 212. The New Albany built its first track on ties laid four feet apart and connected by stringers imbedded in notches in the ties. The rails were simply bar iron, held in place by big spikes driven through the center and their heads countersunk in order not to project above the rails.

It was presently discovered that because the ends of the rails were connected by tongue and groove, there was not enough space to allow for the expansion caused by changes in temperature. The bars heaved and writhed, loosening the spikes. The spikes gave way, the bars spread, and locomotives were derailed. The T-rail was already being used on all of the better-financed roads which were publicizing the sinister menace inherent in bar rails in order to scare passenger traffic off such murderous contrap-



tions. President Brooks was not slow to see the disadvantages of bar iron, and soon he was replacing his own tracks with T-rail made by the Crescent Iron Manufacturing Company of Wheeling, Virginia. This, he told his directors, would relieve the New Albany from the "bad name" of running on bar iron which, he said, "has had a very unfavorable influence upon our passenger business." He added that agents of competing roads had been able, by a series of gross and unspeakable misrepresentations, to alarm passengers and "keep them off our line."

President Brooks was a man of broad vision. He went ahead to get a sort of roving charter from the State of Indiana, a remarkable document that gave the New Albany & Salem the right to extend its line to "any other point or points" in the state. This charter, says the New Albany's historian, Frank P. Hargrave,\* was probably unique in American railroad history. The road made the most of it, too, and by extension of its own line and the absorption of others, it at last reached the Great Lakes in 1854, connecting with the Michigan Central at Michigan City, Indiana, on the shore of Lake Michigan. The line had now reached the climax Brooks had planned for it: It started at New Albany, ran northwesterly to Salem, then almost directly north through Mitchell, Bloomington, Gosport, Greencastle, Crawfordsville, Lafayette, Monon (then called Bradford), and straight up through Starke and Laporte Counties to the lake.

Pioneer railroads such as the New Albany & Salem had to devise their methods of operation as they went along, and the primeval Hoosiers were equal to the task. Their first locomotives were flatteringly named for towns along the line, although after a few years classical mythology was given a trial and the iron horses appeared with *Apollo*, *Mercury*, and *Achilles* on their tenders or name boards. Then came a period when the engines were *Rover*, *Rusher*, *Samson*, *Tornado*, *Meteor*, and even *Rattler*. Each engineer was assigned a particular engine, which he ran so regularly as to feel a sense of ownership. It was common for an engineer to stay with his engine during all of the time required for a round trip, which might be as little as two or as much as six days.

Wood was, of course, the fuel used. The company figured it could run an average train about 28½ miles on one cord of four-foot wood; and the wood could be cut, delivered and piled in the tender for \$1.41 a cord. Wood-up stations were established at regular intervals of from 20 to 25 miles, and here farmers delivered the wood in four-foot lengths. The wood-up at Lafayette was the largest on the line and remained in use until after 1870. It held one hundred cords. To cut the sticks once more for easy handling by firemen, the New Albany's ingenious mechanics de-

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\* See his *A Pioneer Indiana Railroad*, Indianapolis, 1932.

vised a flatcar with a stationary engine aboard, rigged to a circular saw. This was called *The Rooster*, and a picture of a cock appeared in full color on the car's sides. *The Rooster* was hauled up and down the line, its crew making little ones out of big ones. It became an institution.

The early locomotive stacks were not covered with any screen, and naturally gave forth a continuous shower of sparks, causing many fires in grass and forest, for which the company was held responsible. The sparks were also hard on both passengers and employees. Charles Bane, an old hogger of the New Albany, related that one could always tell a member of an engine crew of that day by the holes burned in the back of his vest.

Water for the locomotives was taken at likely places and was poured into the locomotive tank by a bucket brigade of engine and train crews. This system was followed by a pump worked by horse power, the horse being harnessed to a long pole and walking in a circle. Gravity water tanks gradually came into use as the company could afford their construction.

The first passenger cars cost \$2,000 apiece and seated from fifty to sixty persons. The lamps burned lard oil, and were continuously smoking. The task of tending them was given to the trainboy, a sort of forerunner of the news butcher. One of the first trainboys on the New Albany was W. W. Garrott, 13 years old in 1856 when he made his first run. It was a dangerous job for a youngster. The cars were of various heights and were coupled together with three great links of chain, and it was necessary in getting from one coach to another to make a considerable leap. Young Garrot had to do this while carrying a basket of fruit and candy, or perhaps a bundle of newspapers. He was so sure-footed, however, that Conductor Rush Prosser permitted the lad to run regularly on his train. Another of Trainboy Garrott's duties was to supply drinking water to passengers. A barrel of ice water was carried in the baggage car and every hour or so Garrott had to fill a two-gallon can that had a long spout, and with this and two tin cups make his way through the train, cooling the throats of adults and of children, the latter never so thirsty as when traveling on the steam cars.

For a number of years one car served for baggage, mail, and express. The last car on the train was the Ladies' Car, and into this no male dared enter unless accompanied by a woman, who might or might not be a lady. All other males had to sit in the smoker, whether or not they smoked. All passenger cars were heated by round stoves fastened to the wall to prevent turning over in case of derailments, which apparently were many. The trainboys had to keep the stoves going and the woodboxes filled.

There were no wrecking cars in those days. Into a long box hung to the underside of each New Albany baggage car went chains, ropes, crowbars, hammers and such, for use in emergencies. Conductors were to open this "switch box" just before starting a run to make certain that no one had





. . . it was necessary to make a considerable leap . . .



made off with the tools. The conductors were paid \$83.33 a month, the brakemen \$30. The scale for engineer and fireman was about the same. The trainboy got no regular wage, but Garrott recalled that he used to make as much as \$40 a month in commission on sales. He did not mention any side-lines, so perhaps he was not working for a news agency but was on his own.

Like many another early road, the New Albany was often hard put to meet the payroll. At such times it was the custom to issue meal and lodging tickets. The regular paymaster was authorized to redeem these in cash when presented by anyone not an employee of the road but not when offered by employees.

The train crews on the New Albany were not slow in finding means to add to their wages. It soon became a custom for them to buy berries, eggs, and chestnuts along the way and sell them in the larger towns at a profit. The company did not object, at least not for many years, and the business of certain trainmen became so extensive as to call for newspaper comment. In 1857, for instance, the *Review* of Crawfordsville remarked it was time the Postmaster General of the United States added an extra car to make room for the mails that were being crowded out by heavy shipments of eggs and butter incident to the produce business being carried on by mail clerks and baggage men on the New Albany & Salem Railroad.

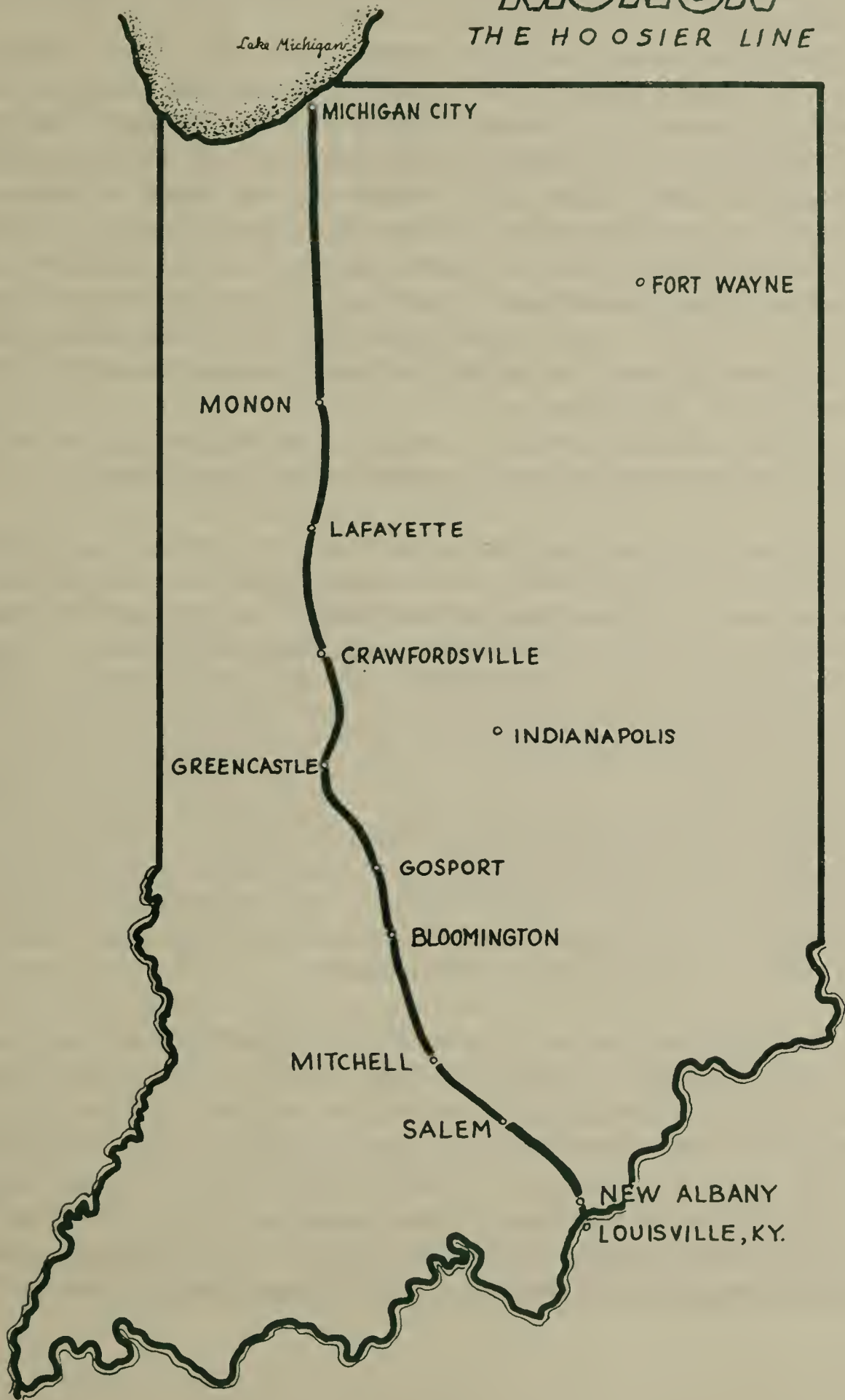
Operating schedules were set up in the early years but were seldom met. Horace Greeley wrote a vivid description about delays on this railroad in a letter to his paper in New York. He was on a speaking tour, this time on Temperance, and planned to leave on a certain train from Lafayette to get to Laporte, where another lecture was due. This was in October of 1853. Greeley went to what he thought was the New Albany & Salem Railroad station in Lafayette, and there he waited a long time only to learn that the train left from another depot, the one on Salem Street. He got to this depot just in time to see the smoke of the departing train. So, he remained overnight in Lafayette, and next day he caught the train. It was, one judges, quite a train:

I was in ample season (says Greeley), but the train that was to start at ten did not actually leave until noon, and then with a body entirely disproportionate to its head. Five cars closely packed with hogs, five ditto with wheat, two ditto with lumber, three or four with live stock and notions returning from the fair, and two or three cattle cars containing passengers, formed entirely too heavy a load for our asthmatic engine which had obviously seen its best days in the service of other roads before that from New Albany to Michigan City was constructed. Still, we went ahead, crossed the Wabash, passed the Tippecanoe Creek Battle ground, ran our engine partly off the track, and got it on again; and by three o'clock had reached Brookston, a station fourteen miles from Lafayette, with a fair prospect of traversing our ninety odd miles by the dawn of Monday morning.



# MONON

THE HOOSIER LINE





Mr. Greeley's troubles were not over. They were merely beginning. The halt at Brookston seemed endless. The engine was in want of both wood and water, but neither was present. The locomotive was uncoupled and run ahead some five miles for water, still farther for wood, and two hours later returned to the stalled train and hitched on. The cheery call of "all aboard" gladdened the hearts of the passengers—though not for long. After a run of half a mile, the cock of the boiler blew out, letting off all water and steam.

The conductor, a hardy soul, one judges, a Spartan ready to meet any and all conditions imposed by life, considered the matter for a bit, then got aboard a handcar and started pumping back to Lafayette where, he said, he would get a locomotive that could haul the train and the disabled engine back to that village. Mr. Greeley did not want to return to Lafayette. He said so, aloud. He had seen, he remarked, enough of Lafayette, and now he must get on to Laporte. The engineer of the stalled train had an idea. He recollected that a pretty good locomotive was resting at Culvertown, forty-three miles ahead, and he proposed to take a handcar—there seemed to be plenty of handcars around Brookston—and go get it and run it back to Brookston.

Mr. Greeley had seen not only enough of Lafayette but of Brookston too. He grabbed his carpetbag and climbed aboard the handcar:

The full moon [reported the editor of the *New York Tribune*] was bright over the eastern woods as with the north star straight ahead, we bid adieu to the embryo city of Brookston. We were seven of us in the handcar, four propelling by twos, as if turning a heavy, two-handed grindstone . . . the car, about equal in size to a wheelbarrow and a half, just managed to hold us and give the propellers working room. To economize space, I sat a good part of the time facing backwards, with my feet dangling over the rear of the car, knocking here and there on a tie or a bridge timber, and often tickled through my boots by the coarse, rank weeds growing up at intervals between the ties and recently stiffened by the hard October frosts . . . We made our first five miles in twenty-five minutes, our first ten miles in an hour, but our propellers grew gradually weary. We stopped twice or thrice for oil, water, and perhaps one other liquor so that we were five hours in making forty-three miles, or from seven o'clock until midnight.

Excellent observer that he was, Greeley saw a good deal of the country on that ride. The night was clear and chilly. The course lay across the east end of that "Grand Prairie that stretched westerly from the banks of the Wabash across Indiana and Illinois to the Mississippi, and thence through Iowa and Nebraska, perhaps to Council Bluffs and the Rocky Mountains." The ground seemed nearly level, sometimes marshy, and for the most part, Greeley noted, clear of woods. But they frequently crossed belts of higher ground and Greeley noted occasional clumps of sturdy oaks



—isles of timber in the prairie sea. He saw four prairie fires, burning brightly but lazily. A flock of wild geese flew over, murmuring. The editor saw one great heron rise from beside the track and fly heavily over the marshes. The handcar frightened several wild animals, including one skunk and one opossum. Greeley took it all in, and at last came the climax. They reached Culvertown and found that the engine they had come for wasn't there. It had been taken north to Michigan City.

Well, that left Mr. Greeley still in the wilderness, still many miles from Laporte. Now that he had got his teeth into the matter, he resolved to go on at any cost. He waked everyone in Culvertown in an attempt to get a team to take him north. There were no teams. But the New Albany & Salem engineer who had bossed the handcar from Brookston liked Greeley's determination. He loaned Greeley the handcar and helped him to find two Culvertown men who agreed to pump the rig the remainder of the night. So Greeley and his two men struck out at one o'clock in the morning. At nine next morning Greeley was in Laporte, ready to speak that afternoon on the evils of dram taking.

Of the country he had passed through on what must have seemed an extremely long day and night, Greeley had an opinion. He reported that he had seen scarcely a hundred houses in that long ride, and they would have been dear at two hundred dollars each. He did see some fine timber, and "he who passes this way ten years hence will see a different state of things." There was a good future for the region, he thought. But he also remarked that the "financiering which conjured up the means of building the New Albany and Michigan City Railroad is worthy of a brazen monument." One wonders what President Brooks thought of such a remark.

If Mr. Greeley rode the New Albany & Salem on a free pass he must have indeed been irritated, just as the man who sees a show on a free pass and finds it bad is irritated. But it is probable the editor paid cash for his trip by train and handcar.

Free passes, of course, became one of the early evils of American railroads, and the New Albany & Salem had more than its share of difficulties and losses from this source, says Mr. Hargrave, the line's careful historian. The line issued passes in great numbers and for every reason that human ingenuity could think of. Whole families—and Hoosier families of the time were large—got passes in payment for the privilege of building a water tank or of piling wood on a farmer's land. All public officials, even those who had been in but were now out of office, expected free passes as a prerogative of their status. So did nearly all shippers of freight; and one such, who claimed he shipped as many hogs as any other men on the line, wanted a pass for that specific reason.

The knockdown on fares appears to have been discovered at an early date by the road's conductors and to have been followed intently and with such abandon that the company felt it necessary to issue an order that all

passengers must purchase tickets before they boarded a train. Tickets for excursions were sold at a reduced rate, and excursions were one of the many ways in which the company sought to raise cash. Salem was the first town to which these trips were made. Later, the favorite excursion points were Bedford, Bloomington, Lafayette, and Michigan City on the lake. These trips were extremely popular, and the crowds grew so rapidly, the company could not always muster sufficient rolling stock to carry them all. It pressed coal cars into service, erecting over them a frame and covering it with green leaved branches of oak and other trees. Almost every political meeting called for a steam-car excursion, plus an ox barbecue.

Both the Adams and the American Express Companies were using the New Albany & Salem by 1853. They were allowed space not to exceed fifty-six square feet in the baggage car, and all express had to be in the care of an express-company agent, who was given passage at half fare. Mail service on the line was established in the same year, and the mails went into the baggage car along with the express—and the various products of the train crews engaging in farm produce as a side-line.

During the first six months of operation the government paid the company \$5,759 for mail service, which came in mighty handy. Telegraphic service along the line was not available until 1859, when the railroad company made a contract with a concern that was soon to become a part of the Western Union. The New Albany & Salem was given exclusive control of the telegraph line for \$9,000, though the Western Union reserved the right to do all of the paid business at four of the principal stations.

The New Albany & Salem managed to make a small yearly profit from the time it was opened until the end of 1856. But this paper profit was hardly a real net; the company owed a good deal of cash in back wages to its employes. President Brooks and his directors were worried enough, and with good right, when the panic of 1857 made its presence known. Brooks was retired and the road put in charge of a trustee. It seems a sad end for the man who thought up and largely built Indiana's first railroad from one end of the state to the other; yet, a survey of all early American railroads would probably show that few of the founding fathers of any line survived longer than the first bankruptcy and reorganization. When the real builders, such as Brooks was, had served their purpose, then the bankers, the financiers, stepped in and took over. It seemed almost an immutable law.

The reorganized New Albany & Salem became the Chicago, New Albany & Louisville, and it appears to have done little better under its new name and trusteeship. Even the Civil War, which saved at least temporarily so many ailing railroads, failed to help this one. In 1870 it was thrown into involuntary receivership. In 1897 another reorganization changed the style of the road to Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville, the



official title it still retains, although it is popularly known as the Monon Route. Just where this name came from is doubtful. Historian Hargrave says that some hold it to be a Potawatomi Indian word meaning "to carry." Another source has it "swiftly moving," a phrase that might make Horace Greeley's shade shake with amusement.

It is more than possible that a part of one of America's great books was written on a Monon train. In 1874 General Lew Wallace was living in Crawfordsville, a Monon town, engaged in writing *Ben Hur*, and though he finished the novel in Santa Fé, where he was serving as territorial governor of New Mexico, he often related that he had composed portions of the book while riding the cars between Crawfordsville and Indianapolis. Specifically, he related that he composed Tirza's song, "Wait Not," while on "a belated train" between those two cities.

Until someone can prove differently, let part of the glory of General Wallace and *Ben Hur* shine upon the honorable rails of the Monon Route. Anton Anderson, assistant chief operating officer of the Monon in 1946, told me he would like to believe that *Ben Hur* was written in part in a Monon coach, and that there is an even or better chance that it was. "General Wallace," he admits, "may have ridden horseback from Crawfordsville to Colfax, then taken a train on either one or the other lines which are now the New York Central and the Pennsylvania to Indianapolis. Or, again, he may have taken the Monon to Lafayette or Greencastle, then one of the other lines to Indianapolis. We do know that he used to come often over the Monon to Shelby, where he did a lot of fishing and hunting along the Kankakee River."

In any case, the original notes of both General Wallace's *Ben Hur* and his earlier *The Fair God* are in the gallant old soldier's library in Crawfordsville, a Monon town, I repeat, and may be seen by interested visitors. There may be no great mountains along the Monon, yet those pencilled notes for *Ben Hur* constitute sections of one of the mountains in our literature, for it was General Wallace's great book that was the first novel to break through the rustic and village opposition to popular fiction. *Ben Hur* rode that gilded chariot right through the front door to enter the homes of Hard-Shell Baptists and Methodists, and to an eager welcome. Hundreds of thousands of back-country Americans learned the charms of fiction through *Ben Hur*. (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* doesn't count, because it was not considered a novel at all but a Christian tract dictated by a Northern Congregational God.) For this reason, if for no other, Carl Van Doren has set *Ben Hur* down as an epochal work, a book that did something to change the thinking of many Americans. General Wallace lived most of his life in Crawfordsville. He worked there, died there. Let some now forgotten coach of the Monon stand as shelter for the traveling author of *Ben Hur*. And let the Monon name a locomotive for him.







